

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 3, Vol. XXIII.

FEBRUARY, 1849.

Whole No. 366.

SERMON CCCCXIII.

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SOLOMON'S EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATION.

"Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."—Eccles. 2: 17.

THERE are few parts of the sacred Scriptures more difficult of interpretation than the one which contains this text. The style of the Book is peculiar; and the rapid transition of thought from one subject to another, and from one state of mind to another—a transition often made without any express mention of it—throws an air of obscurity and, indeed, sometimes an appearance of contradiction over the sentiments uttered.

Hence, the most extravagant ideas have sometimes been deduced from it;—the most mischievous, the most absurd. Some expressions in it have been employed in a manner which might well rejoice libertines; and the licentious themselves have sometimes seized upon ideas contained in it, to justify all the extravagances of an unbridled licentiousness. They have very eloquently repeated that passage in the seventh verse of the ninth chapter, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart," as if it were a fit motto for a man of pleasure. With equal animation and eloquence, they have recited that passage in the twenty-fourth verse of the second chapter—"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor," as if it were designed to give loose reins to indulgence.

And infidelity, as well as libertinism, has made itself merry over the supports supposed to be found in some of these chapters. It has called ideas found here contradictory—the whole Book a jumble of inconsistencies. Bringing together the second verse of

the second chapter—"I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what doeth it;" and the fifteenth verse of the eighth chapter—"Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry;" infidelity has put on a malignant smile, as if she had found at once a refutation of the Bible in its inconsistency, and liberty for the indulgence of chosen "amusements" and sensuality.

Libertines and infidels are not always worth noticing. Most of their pretences are a compound of folly and falsehood, both silly and dishonest. And when men have descended so low as *that*, they are ordinarily best treated, when left to become wise and right, or not, just as they shall choose. Many a foolish man has become confirmed in error, when his error has been dignified by noticing it.—But some of these ideas are worthy of notice; especially, as the notice of them may lead us to a just understanding of the writer of this Book; and as some serious minds also have been embarrassed by expressions contained in it.

The text before us has not escaped misconception: *I hated life because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me*. This has been said to justify an entire disgust with life. It has also been adduced as a proof, that a man of religious sentiments must be so far led off from the ordinary feelings of humanity, as to *hate life* and the world; and must therefore be unfit for society, in respect to enjoying it, or aiming to promote its good. And, it may be, that a true believer sometimes, in dejection and trouble, may seek to justify the gloom of his sentiments, and his dark dislike of a wearisome life, by supposing himself to resemble the author of the text—*I hated life*.

Before, therefore, we enter upon the special consideration of the text itself, we propose to furnish an explanation of the peculiarities of this Book; a matter which seems necessary, not only for a just explanation of the text itself, but for *justifying* the explanation, and for guarding the Book in general from misconception.

On this point we have several ideas to present. We want your entire attention. We are going to teach you a matter for you to remember whenever you read this Book of Solomon.

To this object we devote this sermon. We will attend to the particular idea of the text hereafter.

Let us enter upon the subject. Let us learn how to interpret the Book before us—a Book containing some expressions which sound strange to many ears.

We make one remark, as a clue to the meaning of the author, as a key to unlock the mysteries hidden here, as a wand to sweep away the fogs and clouds, which infidelity, worldliness, and libertinism, (always superficial), have hung round the expressions of this author. The remark is this:—That almost the entire sum of

this Book is composed in the style of *experience* and *observation*. In some passages the writer speaks from experience. In others he speaks from observation. In others still, he mingles both these together, grounding his ideas on both what he had *seen* and what he had himself *felt*.

I. He speaks as a man of *experience*. Examine the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of the first chapter: "I communed with mine own heart, saying, lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly." So in the second chapter, to the end of the tenth verse, he speaks of his own experience. "I said in mine heart, go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure . . . I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine . . . I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards." And he goes on to tell of his *servants*, and *cattle*, and *singers*, and *silver*, and *gold*, and *delights*, not "withholding his heart from any joy." In the same style of experience he utters the fifteenth verse of the eighth chapter (already cited), "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry."—The same style of experience, of history, of autobiography, runs through the Book.

If ever there was a man qualified by the experience of it, to tell what pleasure is worth, that man was Solomon, the author of the Book before us. He was "king over Israel in Jerusalem," in the days of its highest splendor. His proud city glittered with gold. It abounded in luxury—in every refinement. To its glory all the civilized world had contributed. Egypt had sent thither in profuse abundance, the finest of her wheat. The East had sent the choicest of her delicacies,—the aroma of her plants to breathe their perfumes on the air of Palestine, and the glitter of her gems to flash in the sun-light abroad, or adorn the persons that moved amid the splendor of her proud palaces at home. The South and the West had contributed all the adornments of architecture. Science and art contributed to the enjoyments of taste. Arabia had sent in her mathematics. Tyre and Sidon their purple and fine linen. Poesy sang. Music found a home there. And amid all these resources and all this splendor, Solomon gave loose reins to his desires to enjoy them all, better situated than ever man was, before or since, to prove by his own experiences what the pleasures of the world are worth. And in this Book, he has given us an account of the whole matter. He has summed it up in five words—**VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT**. He summed it up (just as you would have done if you had had his wisdom and trial), on the ground of his own experience. He had tried it all, and knew what was its value; and as he recapit-

ulates to us in this Book his experiences, he tells us how he turned from one pleasure to another, and one earthly promise to another, with the sickening feeling, *this also is vanity*.—It is on this principle that he makes his remarkable introduction—an introduction which has no parallel or resemblance in any other writing that we have ever seen: “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” He spake from the heart; he was a man of experience. He had tried “*amusements*.”

Now let me ask you to notice, in his own phraseology, how this remark about his style is applicable. Commence with the text itself. “I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me.” *When* did he hate it? How are we to understand him? Is he telling us what he thinks *now*? or what he thought while his reason was entranced and he was pursuing the vanities of the world?—If you were to write your own biography, how would you write it? Suppose you had been eagerly pursuing some object for a time, and afterwards had altered your sentiments in distaste and disappointment, and still afterwards had set your heart upon something very different, and suppose you were going to employ your own experience as an argument to persuade other people to take a wiser way than you had taken at first, how would you be apt to express yourself? You would have three different points to hold up. At one time, you would mention the sentiments you entertained at *the period* when you were eagerly pursuing your favorite object. At another time, you would mention the sentiments you entertained at *the period* when you had concluded to abandon it. At another time, you would mention the sentiments you entertain *now*, when having set your heart upon another object, you are aiming, by the force of your own experience, to induce your friend to shun the error and copy the wisdom of your example. And if you were much gifted in the art of persuasion, your ideas would move backwards and forwards from one of these periods to another, in order to bring into frequent contrast the benefits of one course and the evil of its opposite.—Well: Solomon has done precisely this in the book before us. He has done just as you would have done. He states his sentiments *after* his recovery from error, and while he is under the direction of Divine wisdom. He states his sentiments in the outset. And he states his sentiments in the intermediate time—in the day of his disappointment, when he had got no farther than to hear and feel the *rebuke* of truth, but had not yet taken its positive direction. And he passes from one of these to another, under no rule but that of the heart’s logic, more intent on persuasion than on the name of scholarship. And when he says, “I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me,” there is no difficulty in perceiving to *what period* of his heart’s history he alludes. Manifestly he does

not express his *present* sentiments. He speaks of the past; he employs what the grammarians call the "past tense," *I hated life*: he does not say he hates it now. Just as manifestly, he does not express the sentiments he entertained when he was pursuing, with all the zest of his heart, the vanities of the world. The expression refers to the other period—to the time of his disappointment, disgust, and dissatisfaction—to the moment when he awoke from his dream, and found it *was* a dream: *I hated life*. Nothing is more natural. He had been living for mere pleasure. It did not satisfy him. It could not. He knew of nothing better to live for. His pleasures palled upon his senses—his heart was sick—he was disgusted with life itself: *I hated life*.

It may be that some of you can sympathize with him, far enough at least to understand him. Tax your recollection. Has there been no moment when you were disgusted with life itself? Have you not felt so? When your plans have been dashed, or your pride mortified, or your hearts have sickened amid your worldly vanities, or your health has failed and your spirits sunk, and all the world seemed to you a bubble, a dream; have you not wondered what you lived for; and amid this empty and sickening scene, been disgusted with life itself? Very well; Solomon would have you feel so. He would convince you, that sooner or later you *must*. He would employ this feeling as an argument, *first* to turn off the heart from the world's deceitful promises, and *second*, to turn it to something better—to that love and service of God, wherein life shall be as valuable, as, spent upon the world, it ought to be disgusting.—Do not stop with your disgust. Follow Solomon farther. Heart-sick of the world, do not ask merely in distaste and despondency, what do I live for? or, in disgust and despair, do not wish you had never lived at all. Turn to the great and valuable ends of your existence, which Solomon has summed up in the closing sentence of this Book, and calls the *conclusion of the whole matter*—"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man, for God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

On the same principle we interpret the verses immediately after the text. "Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" So he felt when he had become disgusted with his dissipation, and *before* he had turned him to labor for another life and another world. How natural his expression! It is an artist-sketch of the heart of a selfish man! "I hated labor, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me," *wise* or *fool*. He must leave it, be it crown, or gold, or splendor. He must leave it, and perhaps the son that inherits it shall be a *fool*! He

must leave it; and this was the lament of his selfishness, at the time of his disgust with life. If he had now been a man of benevolence, it might have given him some satisfaction, that what he should leave behind him might contribute something to the good of his successor. But he was not yet a man of religious benevolence. He was a man of selfishness, and of selfish disgust and dissatisfaction, mourning that he must leave his gold to his heir, and exchange his royal purple for the shroud of the tomb.

In the expression, "who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, yet shall he have rule over all my labor," possibly Solomon utters his present sentiments, and not the sentiments of his period of disgust. We told you that the sentiments of these two periods were sometimes mingled together in his argument. Take your choice betwixt the two. Neither is very unnatural. A wise man, a pious man, may very well feel that his living for another world has an enforcement from the fact, that his heirs may be fools, and the inheritance he leaves them may do them no good: this reflection may very well come in, to check his remaining worldliness of spirit, or to induce him to do good with his possessions *before* he is dead, and others shall employ them to do hurt. A man disgusted with life and the world may very well find his sentiments of disgust strengthened by the idea, that all his labors and possessions may be as vain for his children as they have been for himself. *Fools* may be his heirs! *fools* may take the avails of his labor! and as he thinks of it, his increased disgust may exclaim, "this also is vanity."

On the same principle we interpret the fifteenth verse of the eighth chapter. It is a piece of autobiography. The author is telling, not what is his opinion *now*, but what his opinion was once; not what it was in his period of disgust with life, but what it was before that, in the period of his dissipation. "I commended mirth"—(he does not commend it *now*),—"I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink and to be merry." So he thought in his season of pleasure and dissipation. He thought there was *nothing better*. He thought just as the silly sons of pleasure think now. He confesses it to them. He tells them that he has been over their ground, he has tried the whole matter, he was once foolish enough to feel as they feel, "that there is nothing better under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be merry." And now, as a man of experience, as an old hand in the business, who has been through the whole, and knows all about it, he claims to be heard, when he tells them, "this also is vanity—it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" (8 : 13).—Young men would do well to hear him. He ought to be heard. Besides

his inspiration, he was now an old man. He was an experienced man. He had run the whole round of pleasure. He had justified it. He had said as they say, that "there is nothing better than to eat and to drink and to be merry." Now he knows better. He knows those of such merriment and dissipation do not *fear God*, it cannot be *well with them*: and when he says that "the wicked shall not prolong his days which are as a shadow;" young men should remember that he who lives *to eat and to drink and to be merry* will not live long; and, however screened and hidden may be this drinking and merriment now, it will not be hidden long—"God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing."—He does not plead for "amusements."

On the same principle we interpret a multitude of other expressions found in this Book. "I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine. . . . I made me great works; I builded me houses and planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards; . . . I gathered me silver and gold; I got me men-singers and women-singers; . . . I commended mirth; . . . I said, drink thy wine with a merry heart; . . . live joyfully; let thy garments be always white and thy head lack no ointment;"—these, all these, are expressions of the sentiments which Solomon entertained in the days of his pleasure.

You cannot err in fixing upon the passages which express his sentiments *after* the days of his pleasure were ended. The Book is full of them. After pleasure palled upon his senses, and his heart sickened with disgust of life; he chose something more wise than either—he turned to religion. His sentiments *now* are uttered in such passages as that, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. Fear God and keep his commandments; this is the whole of man"—his duty, felicity, and interest. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged" (as sometimes they may be), "yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God . . . but it shall not be well with the wicked." (Ch. 12 : 1, 13,—8 : 12, 13.) Looking on the world, all its pleasure, pomp and promise, he turns from one thing to another, *this, this also is vanity*. Looking at the trials and fears that cluster around the pathway of life, he says, "he that feareth God shall come forth of them all." (7 : 18). Looking forth into another world, he sees that the retributions of *that* shall clear up the confusions of this, "for God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12 : 14).

Let this suffice on the head of *experience*. It is plain that Solomon in this Book gives much of his own heart's history, as an argument for religion; and that he makes three points promi-

nent: *first*, his sentiments in the period of his indulgence; *second*, his sentiments in the period of his disgust with life; and *third*, his sentiments in the after-period—the period of his piety.

II. A second characteristic of the style of this Book is a little variation from this: much of it is in the style of *observation*. The author not only states what his heart had felt, but what his eyes had seen. He does this for the same purpose, namely, to persuade men, especially young men, to religion. He draws an argument for it, from things that met his eyes. And while he is pursuing the argument, he sometimes unites, *with* the account of what he had noticed, the sentiments he entertained at the different periods we have mentioned. This, also, is perfectly natural. You would have done the same thing. If you had wished to persuade any person, you would both have mentioned the facts, (what your eyes had seen), and your own feelings in view of them—your feelings at different times.

You cannot but be convinced, that Solomon argues as an observer, when you notice the abundance of passages like the following (1: 14)—“I have SEEN all the works that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity.” (3: 16)—“I SAW under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.” (5: 13)—“There is a sore evil which I have SEEN under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.” (If he had lived till this time, he might have seen the same thing.) (6: 1, 2)—“There is an evil which I have SEEN under the sun, and it is common among men; a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it.” (8: 9)—“All this have I SEEN, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.” (8: 16, 17)—“When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to SEE the business that is done upon the earth . . . then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun, because, though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it.” (10: 7)—“I have SEEN servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.” (He would see it now, if he were alive.) (9: 11)—“I returned and SAW under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.” (He knew no better. He thought so then. He could see no farther. He was a fool. He thought it was mere *time and chance* at that period, the period of distaste, which preceded his pious recognition of God.)

All these passages, and an abundance of others, prove to us,

that Solomon composed this Book as a man of observation: that he makes use of the things which his own eyes had "SEEN under the sun," to point the maxims and give strength to the arguments he utters.

We said it would be perfectly natural, that, while aiming to persuade young men to religion, he should tell them not only the facts which fell under his observation, but also his feelings in view of them at the time. He has done this—just as you would have done. Notice his account of some facts in the first verse of the fourth chapter, and his feelings in view of them in the second and third verses: "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter, and on the side of the oppressors there was power: but THEY had no comforter." (You may judge of the keenness of his observation by this last clause.) Then follows an account of the feelings he had in view of all this, when he noticed it at first: "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." So he thought *then*. He thought *the dead* were more to be envied than *the living*. He thought it would have been better still, never to have been born. Who would *not* think so, if he had only eyes to see earthly things; and had no faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen?

A similar account of his feelings at that time, is recorded in the second verse of the ninth chapter, when he felt more like a Deist than a believer: "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and the wicked: to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath." So he thought *then*. He knew no better *then*. Mere observers are apt to think so. He thought differently afterwards; he extended his contemplation beyond visible things—things *under the sun*, as he calls *them* so often and so significantly. Though it may be true, as far as eyes can see, that "that there is one event to all," yet he did not therefore, adopt that pernicious maxim, "let us eat and drink for to-morrow we shall die." He came very near doing so; he wishes young men to know it. But he avoided that rock on which so many make shipwreck of their faith and their philosophy at the same time. He said, "I know it shall be well with them that fear God; it shall not be well with the wicked," (8: 12, 13).

III. There is a third characteristic of the style of this Book, not necessary to mention indeed for the interpretation of this text, as the others *were*, but, considering the nature of this sermon,

and to complete the ground-work for the interpretation of the whole Book, we mention it here.—It is Solomon's *keen irony*. He was aiming to persuade men, especially young men, to religion. No easy task! Their blood warm—their hopes ardent—death to them, apparently far-off, and the world dressed in such tempting smiles and splendor before their eyes, they will naturally cling to its gaiety and merriment. They will say they were made for it, and *it* was made for them; they do not see any harm in it, and they *do* see, there is “one event to them all, to the righteous and the wicked,” they are about alike in misery here, and they die alike.—Solomon responds to such sentiments in his keenest irony. He affects to agree with them. He takes up these sentiments and just preaches them back into the bosoms they came from—preaches just as these merry young men want him to preach. (9 : 7)—“Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for now God accepteth thy works:” That is the way they want him to preach; and in irony, in cutting sarcasm, he does it: he yields to them, and tells them that their wine and merriment are acceptable to God, on their own principles. Then he goes on with the sermon for which they have furnished the text: carry out thy principles then: “let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy VANITY, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy VANITY” (he cannot help repeating it): “for that is thy portion in this life,” (all you are good for), “and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun” (all you can get, on your own principles). “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” (music, merriment, mirth, wine, no matter what foolery), “do it with thy might,” (now or never), “for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.” What cutting irony! Their own principles, carried out, just about make beasts of them! (3 : 18). They must labor here, for nothing but vanity, and die, but to rot. Go on, then, if that is all you were made for, eat and drink for to-morrow you shall die. (Isa. 22 : 13).

The same species of irony may be found in the ninth verse of the eleventh chapter. The author is preaching back his own sentiments into the bosom of a young man, *expecting to live many years and rejoice in them*, and therefore indisposed to religion. With severe sarcasm, he reminds him that youth vanishes, as the young man wishes to live in pleasure, and neglect God. Go on then! carry out your principles! “Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,” (they will soon be gone—haste in mirth or you cannot have it), “and walk in the ways of thine heart” (if you will), “and in the sight of thine eyes” (live as you list);—and then the preacher adds

a solemn idea of his own, for this merry youth to carry along with him in his pleasure;—"but *know thou*, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh;" fear nothing, care for nothing but pleasure, if you will, in this "childhood and youth," which are vanity:—and *because* youth is soon gone, and death soon comes, and the judgment after it;—be a fool and be merry; you say there is nothing better!—If Solomon was deep in experience and extensive in observation, he was also as remarkably keen in his irony.

The discussion of the text itself will come hereafter. These remarks on the style of this Book, lead me to utter some counsels.

1. Beware how you interpret its expressions. For example, when you read in the second chapter, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to hate; a time of war;" do not be so superficial as to suppose, that Solomon is enjoining or justifying war, and hatred, and dancing, and killing. Put the whole passage under its proper head. It belongs to the chapter of *observation*. He is only stating facts as they were; things he saw, and not telling how they should be.—Apply this advice to his expressions of experience and of irony also. Hence,

2. See what is the great drift and purpose of this Book; namely, to persuade, young men especially, to fear God, keep his commandments, and fit for the day of judgment. This is its sole aim. In accordance with this, all its particular expressions are to be interpreted. If you interpret them wisely, now, "in the days of your youth," they will give you an eye fixed on the judgment-seat of Christ.

3. Aim to copy Solomon's mode of reasoning—spread out his argumentation as wide as you will. *Be observers*. Look at the world—its life, death, gold, honor, merriment, wine, wisdom, labor, laughter, tears, all that is in it, all that is visible of the works of *God under the sun*; and then ask yourselves solemnly, if all this does not amount to an overwhelming argument, that there is something better for you *beyond the sun*, which you ought first and forthwith to seek after.—Add your own experience to Solomon's. He found the world vanity. What have you found it? He sometimes even hated life. So will you; if you do not employ it for the life to come. Have you not found it "vexation of spirit" already? Deeper vexations are in store for you, if you will not live unto God. Do you need any deeper ones? Have you not enough already to convince you, that your heart runs wrong, when it runs upon the world; and that your affections and purposes ought not any longer to lie supremely upon a world, which can only furnish you, as an unbeliever, two things—vanity and a grave?

SERMON CCCCXCIV.

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HATRED OF LIFE.

"Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me : for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."—Ecclesiastes 2 : 17.

WE directed your attention to this passage on a former occasion. At that time, we desired to lay the foundation of a just interpretation of it. We could not *then* do more in the space of time your indulgence allows to us. We propose now a more close attention to the text itself. But it will be necessary to advert to the principle we then laid down—a principle needful to be kept steadily in mind by any and every man, who would have a right understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes.

The principle was this : that Solomon wrote this book to persuade men, especially young men, to religion, by an argument drawn from his own life. On the ground of that life, he holds up the world before the eye of a young man, simply to have him look at it as it is, in all its forms and promise, and then make up his mind whether it is worth the consideration he gives to it, while for its sake, he continues in his irreligion, and does not *seek first* the favor of God. To show the world in its just light, Solomon speaks as an old practitioner, and an old observer—a man of feelings and of eyes. And while he adverts so constantly throughout the book to his own experience and observation, as a man who had tried riches and pomp and pleasure, and who had lived long enough to see all that the wide-spread shiftings and fluctuations of this world can heave up ; he distinguishes three points of his own heart's history :

First, Sometimes he tells what he felt and thought, at the period when he was going on in the full tide of worldly enjoyment and hope :

Second, Sometimes he expresses the sentiments he entertained at the period when he had found that the world could not answer his purpose, and found himself heart-sick and disgusted with it all ; and *before* he had turned to God, placing his affections and directing his aims upon something better than earth :

Third, Sometimes he expresses the sentiments he entertained *now* ; when he had chosen "the fear of God" and "the keeping of his commandments ;" and when, as an old hand in the

matter, he could tell irreligious young people what the world's offers were good for; and what was the only thing that was worth living for.

The text before us expresses the sentiments he entertained in the second of these periods, which we have denominated the period of disgust. You perceive he speaks of the past—he speaks of himself—he speaks as a man of experience and observation: “I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” You perceive, he saw the world in its true light, so far as it is considered by itself, and *not* considered in its relation to another. He was heart-sick of it all; he even *hated life*; i. e. he was disgusted with it—he saw it useless, and found it distasteful. Things met his eyes which threw a cast of vanity over all human existence; and feelings came up in his heart, which made even life itself in such a world as this, a sickening portion, a burden, an empty and distressful dream.—So he felt without religion. So he found life. So he would have all the irreligious feel. So he would assure them that they shall find life, sooner or later, just as surely as they live in this world without God. Sooner or later, (much as they love the world, and eagerly as they pursue it,) they shall half wish, or quite wish, they had never lived at all.

Let us enter into this subject. Let us spread out this lesson. Let us cast our eyes over the whole scenes of an irreligious life, and see if anywhere we can discern anything which ought not to make an irreligious man sympathize with Solomon in his period of disgust—*I hated life*.

Not to exhaust this subject, but to give some hints of its extent, we name to you six ideas:

1. The confusion and darkness which cover life;
2. The results of a worldly experience;
3. Knowledge of men;
4. Excessive fondness for the world;
5. Failure in worldly endeavors;
6. Failure of even that intellectual excellence, which rises above “amusements” and sensuality.

I. It needs no argument to prove that the dispensations of God are often shrouded in impenetrable darkness. But the *depth* of that midnight hovers over the head of an irreligious man. God's promises cast light where nothing else can; and one of the present, and often realized advantages of religion, is to be found in the fact, that the Divine dispensations are all of them confirmatory of the Divine promises, and all illustrative of their significance. There is not a thing so strange, a distress so deep, a night so dark, but the very unacceptableness of the matter brings along with it to the Christian some lesson of profit, as it bears on an immortality to come, or some balm of comfort, as God stands by his people in

the furnace of trial. With the wicked, with the worldly, it is not so. They read time by the light of time's own torch, flickering and fitful. They read the world aside from the light cast back upon it from the anticipated fires of its coming conflagration. Hence they cannot read rightly. Time, the world, life, are all misunderstood; and so misunderstood by an irreligious man, that he is compelled to be disgusted with life, or else act very much on the proposal of licentiousness, *let us eat and drink for to-morrow we shall die*—(Is. 22: 13.)

How can a man be satisfied here, or be anything better than sickened with life, when at every glance over society, his eyes meet with instances of virtue depressed, and vice prosperous? Where is the equity in this? On what principle is it, that the man who has done most good to society is often least rewarded and least esteemed by society; and the man who has done most evil to his generation shall be the very man upon whom earth confers most of her advantages, and men of the world lavish most of their smiles? The wicked often prosper. The righteous often suffer. Confusion seems to reign over life. As a man looks upon it, his eyes behold strange things; and as he thinks in the days of his youth, of entering upon that capricious scenes wherein awards are distributed, not according to merit, to industry, to worth; how can he avoid being disheartened and disgusted with a life which proposes to him, he knows not what? He has no religion. He cannot think or feel on religious principles. He sees only uncertainty and confusion. On the one hand, he beholds men, whom he is compelled to despise, seated in high places of honor and trust; and on the other hand, he beholds men, whose transactions are detestable, gifted with every desired prosperity. He says to himself "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all"—(9: 11). So he thinks. He knows no better. He sees no farther. And can you wonder, that he should be thoroughly heart-sick of a life, which he must go and spend amid such a scene of turmoil, confusion, and uncertainty? Is it any wonder, if, disgusted with all that life and the world can offer, he should just let *time and chance* dispose of them as they will? Or if he looks forward to the end, all the end that his now worldly soul cares anything about, how can he avoid dissatisfaction, the most perfect disgust with life, while he says, as man "came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to God as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand? And this is a sore evil, that in all points, as he came so he shall go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness."—(5: 15-17.) How can he

avoid disgust with life, while his lips, untaught in the language of Israel, are saying, (9 : 2-5.) "all things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath: this is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead: for to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion: for the living know they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten?" As the mind of this irreligious man sweeps over all human life, from the time of man's birth in nakedness, down to the period when time has worn the letters from his tomb-stone, and the *memory of all is alike forgotten*; is it any wonder, if such a life disgusts him? if, sick at heart, he turns away from its darkness, distresses and perishing memory? Life, the world, time, were never designed to be read in their own light simply. They were designed to be read in the full blaze of eternity. A wise man cannot be anything else than dissatisfied with life, while all his ideas linger on things this side the tomb. He may prosper here, he may not. And whether he does or not, he deems a matter of *chance*,—and since all die alike and alike are forgotten, a matter of indifference. He is dissatisfied with the world: he is dissatisfied with God when he thinks of Him; and dissatisfied with himself, whether he considers his experience or contemplates his prospects. "I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me."—He should look *beyond* the sun,—beyond the world,—beyond time. His disgust with life cannot be easily cured in any other method. Eternity alone can explain the darkness and disorders of time.

II. After all the earthly bounties of God, and all the provisions He has made to meet the wants, capacities, and tastes of our common humanity; there never yet has been a man who arrived at anything like a full satisfaction. This was one of Solomon's stings of experience. He tried hard to attain contentment. He run the full round of pleasure. He tried wealth. He tried honor. He tried pomp and splendor. He tried science. He tried wine. He was resolved to be happy: "whatever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor"—(2: 10.) But it all would not do. He tried in vain. His hopes were blasted, and his heart saddened and sickened by the very profusion in which he sought satisfaction. And then he sums up the matter in a method most instructive to a votary of the

world: "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labor that I had labored to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"—(2: 11.) "I hated life."—The difference between Solomon and our worldlings is this: *He* succeeded; most of our worldlings fail! He was disgusted by success; most of our worldlings are disgusted by failure! His disgust with life bore off his mind towards the *life that is to come*; THEIR disgust, confined to experienced things, and not calling their thoughts to things hoped for, only fastens their mind more fixedly on the *life that now is*. But it will all be in vain. They cannot compel the world to satisfy them. They will be as much disgusted when the next year is closing upon them as they are now, when the last sands of this are falling, and when their hearts are so far from satisfaction. No matter what a worldly man attains, it does not answer his purpose. It disappoints him. It cheats him. It cheats him just as much in successes as in failures, "neither is his eye satisfied with riches"—(4: 8.) And it is a thousand wonders, that he does not become more disgusted with life than he is, and sooner disgusted. It is a thousand wonders that he does not *perceive* that his dissatisfaction springs, not from the limitation of his successes, but from the very nature of the objects he pursues. Such objects never can satisfy him. Give him anything and he will crave more. And if he would only stop now, and take one sober thought about the ashes, the phantom, the dream he is pursuing, he could not avoid being disgusted with a life distressfully expended on such vanities. Every unbeliever in the world would be disgusted with life, if he would only notice the emptiness of that for which he is spending it. He is doomed—*no*, he dooms *himself*, to walk in a valley of trouble. Its end is as dark as its portion is troublesome; and it is no wonder, that as long as he is an irreligious man his most sober and deep thought compels him to wish or half wish, that he had never lived at all!—There is but one rock of repose for an immortal soul,—and *that rock is Christ*.

III. The same, or a worse species of dissatisfaction with life may very well result from what is often experienced amid once valued and sought intimacies and attachments.—Let us do the melancholy justice. Let us not attribute all their downcast feelings to a dark and gloomy disposition, nor to the east wind that has shattered their nerves. Where is the man, whose heart has not saddened at the recollection of professions once made to him? Who is there that has not found occasion to exclaim, what a world!—what friendships!—what friends! How soon their affections cool! How readily they fly from me in trouble! They could love me in prosperity, but they forsake me in adversity! Perfidious wretches! They could bask in the sunshine of my favor, when my favor was good for anything for them; they could de-

sert me in trouble, unshamed at their perfidy and their mean selfishness! "Two are better than one; for if they fall one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up"—(4: 10.) Such laments do not all come from a disordered fancy, from unstrung nerves, or from a melancholy disposition. They come sometimes from the realities of distressful experience; and that distress strikes so deep and so disgustfully upon the heart, (not now to say so common), that there is little ground to wonder, if life itself, to be spent among such sunshine friends, becomes a matter of disgust:—"I hated life." If you cannot realize it, I can only say, the realization is yet in store for you. You have but one way of avoiding it. You must have a *friend that sticketh closer than a brother*, to whom you may flee in every time of trouble, and with whose spirit you must be so deeply imbued, that, instead of hating the treacherous that pierce you, you shall pity them, and pray, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."—It is very common that an unbeliever's own companions make him hate life itself.

IV. There are instances in which this detestation of life results in its strongest measure from an excessive valuation of what one proposes to gain from the world, while life lasts. As ministers of the Gospel, we have something to do sometimes with this strange aspect of human nature. Let us tell you a secret: the most extravagant *fondness* for the world which we are ever called to notice and compelled to deplore, is indicated to us in the language of laments and dissatisfaction. Our acquaintance is unbosoming himself to us. He tells how he feels. He says, I detest the world; I despise it; I could wish to be dissolved from it; it has done me injustice; life in such a world is little more than a burden!—How is this? Does this complainer realize the world's emptiness? Has he risen superior to its charms? No such thing. Its charms are as dear to him as ever. He is heart-sick; but does not half know what makes him so. Its charms have escaped him; and his contempt of the world just springs from that fact. He had an excessive love for it, and his lamentations *now*, are just in proportion to his fondness once, aye his fondness still. He is not sorry for sin; he is only sorry his sin cannot find the means of indulgence. He is not about to repent; he is only taking revenge upon a world that has cheated him, by calling it hard names, and pouring contempt upon it. Take a little leaf of his heart's biography: I write it in this way: He commenced life in raptures with the world: his heart bounded to its embraces: he did not imagine that friends would be treacherous, fortune capricious, hopes vanishing, riches have wings, and the blood of youth and health soon circulate pain through his bones instead of pleasure. But his dream of fancy was soon broken. Its gilded spell

gave place to a hated reality. And now he is disgusted with life in such a world as this, just in the very proportion as he loved and loves still, the things beyond his reach : he hates life just as much as he loves the world ; and he rails at the world simply because it eludes him.—That is a leaf of his heart. He does not own it ; he does not believe it, simply because he does not know himself, because his *heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. His disgust with life is just the result of an excessive worldliness. It does not result from the serious reflections which an immortal soul ought to have—reflections controlled by the contrast between *the life that now is and that which is to come*.

V. A disrelish for life often springs from the cutting contemplation of the end of all man's endeavors, (2 : 11.) One does not like to labor in vain. It is disheartening to expend much toil for little good ; and it becomes the more so, when the good falls nowhere, either to the man himself or to those who come after him. If there could be any fixed certainty, that beneficial results shall come *somewhere*, and that, though the laborer does not reach them himself, yet his labor shall bless his successors ; the recollection of this might bring some solace to weary mind and weary muscles ; pride if not benevolence might then extend its regards onwards beyond life, and as far as the results of present exertion shall reach—and the man might value life on much the same principle as some men put value on the tomb-stone, that shall tell where they lie—it gives their earthly existence a kind of extension.

But behold the reality. Even worldly men are often compelled to see it. There is *no* certainty ; none that is solacing. Toil and labor must be expended very much in vain. At least the wicked think so, whenever they really think at all. Solomon thought so. Hear him. He asks, (2 : 23)—“For what hath man of all his labor and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun ? for all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief, yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. (2 : 11). Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do ; and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” So much for the present.—And what in the future ? The future is no better. “There is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool forever, seeing that which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man ? as the fool. Therefore I hated life.”—And the future is no better when contemplated in respect to those who shall take the fruits of our labor—“Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun ; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me ; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool ? Yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed

myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity." (2: 18, 19). Fools may take our possessions. Fools may be our heirs. All our labor, instead of profiting them, may only be a curse to them. Rehoboams may inherit the crowns of our Solomons! and personal dissipation, and divided and ruined kingdoms, may be the fruits of all our earthly successes! Who then, can blame a disgust with life? If this is all, who ought *not* to be disgusted? Oh, that men would see it! certainly we do not live here for life's sake! most certainly, the world's history, almost every heart's history, is made by God himself, as bold a lesson to turn man's eyes towards the life to come, as could be written by the sunbeams on the ashes of a burnt world!—There is only one thing which never cheats endeavor, and never cheats hearts.

VI. But Solomon tried other resources. He was a man of science. Seldom, if ever, hath he been equalled. The wisdom embodied in his Book of Proverbs is unparalleled. Not to speak now of its religion, it is unequalled in its wisdom in reference to the common principles and economy of life. You have been taught how he coined those proverbs. To make a single one of them demanded great labor—extensive and acute observation. His mind examined and weighed everything connected with the subject; and having attained its knowledge and formed its judgments and made its discriminations, it condensed the whole matter in one short proverb, the embodied wisdom of a world of thought. There never was such a man. He studied everything. He says, "I turned myself to behold wisdom" (2: 12). "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven" (1: 13). He applied himself to the sciences; and he expresses the superiority of his opportunities and means, by the question, (2: 12)—"What can the man do that cometh after the king?" *i. e.*, who can have such advantages for science as royalty furnished him? And he improved them. In the first Book of the Kings, fourth chapter and thirtieth verse, it is said—"Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men." The twelfth verse of the third chapter of that Book, tells us what God himself said to him—"Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." The thirty-second and thirty-third verses of the fourth chapter furnish us a catalogue of some of the subjects on which he composed treatises, part of which are lost to the world—"He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. He spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things and of fishes."

A moralist, a poet, a philosopher, a historian, a botanist, a master in the natural history of beasts and birds and fishes and creeping things; there is no danger of extravagance in affirming, that his extent of science has seldom or never been equalled. He *gave his heart* to it, as he says; and he signally succeeded.

If, therefore, there was ever a man, or ever will be one, qualified by the knowledge and experience of the matter to estimate literature and science justly; that man was Solomon. And what does he say? Does he deem all this worth living for? Does it give him a relish for life, any more than his pleasure, "I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what doeth it?" or any more than his labors and his possessions, which might fall into the hands of *a fool*? Not at all. Take his own testimony. He does, indeed, in one sentence, express a preference for knowledge. He says—"A wise man's eyes are in his head," *i. e.*, a man of knowledge is not blind, while a fool "walketh in darkness." But after all, the whole array of his literature and science could not hinder his disgust of life, or make him feel it was worth living for. Read the eighth verse of the first chapter—"All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing;" science cost him more labor than it furnished him satisfaction; it could not fill an immortal soul. Read the eighteenth verse—"But in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth in knowledge, increaseth in sorrow." How is *this*? How is it? Why, it comes in a hundred ways; one is, that the point of satisfaction is never reached, not only, but is pushed further off, and appears more inaccessible, as knowledge increases, "that which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out." (7 : 24): this is an affliction. Another is, that, as knowledge increases, you will see more and more to deplore in the world, and more and more to detest in its inhabitants. As your skill unmasks selfishness, and sees through the disguises of insincerity; and as you find the very man who has a smile for your presence, will have a sneer for you in your absence; you will have less bliss, than when you had more ignorance; you will be disgusted with men, and blush to think that you belong to the race. Another way is, that your increasing knowledge will have little justice done to it. You have laboriously fitted yourself for a station, that the world will not give you. A dolt, a simpleton, a profound block-head, whose stupidity is his only qualification, will be ushered before you, into the station, place, or business, for which you have laboriously qualified yourself in vain. Another way is, that knowledge will bear hard upon an irreligious pride. Fools may be vain. Vanity is a vice of the superficial. But men of extensive knowledge cannot have the stupid bliss of a high self-esteem. To say all in one word, when you have explored the heights and depths

of all earthly science, and gratified your zeal for knowledge in all that is knowable among men; you will be compelled to an *increase of sorrow*, because all this comes no nearer to satisfy your immortal soul, than did the ignorance in which you began. You will say like Solomon—"As it happeneth to the fool so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity" (2: 15).—Considered in view of eternity, the longest periods of time are no more than the shortest; and measured by the wants of an immortal soul, the most extensive science hath no more sufficiency than ignorance and stupidity. And if you could try it all, and on the ground of your experience should desire to leave your advice as a legacy to your son; you would just copy the twelfth verse of the twelfth chapter of this Book—"By these, my son be admonished, of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness to the flesh. Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me, for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Disgust with life, when life is spent for any mere earthly purposes, will be an inevitable result of all sober thinking. Men cannot avoid it, but by avoiding thought, by shutting their eyes, by drowning their senses in the intoxication of thoughtless merriment, or gilded and baseless hopes.

It were easy to add to these items. Let these suffice.

But we cannot close without some other ideas, some lessons by way of inference.

1. Man was made for religion. He must have been. If not, he was made by an enemy, made for *vanity and vexation of spirit*. His life, and all he can gain as he spends it, will sooner or later become matter of disgust, contempt and sickening; just as surely as he lives and must die, if he does *not* live for immortality, and die to inherit it. If an immortal life is not within his reach; his life is itself a dark riddle, his world a riddle, his heart and conscience and hopes are only curses to him, all cheats; and it matters scarcely a song, whether he dies this year or the next, or lives a century! If he will not live for immortality, he will soon hate life, and soon wish he had never lived at all! He was made to "fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man."

2. The felicities of the irreligious, in this life, all depend upon lack of thought, and the power of deception. They cheat themselves: the world cheats them; their hopes, their aims, all cheat them! They are not what they think, and the world is not what they think it. Life, spent as they are spending it, will do them no good. How mournful, to see young people, (while life is on the wing, and its years one after another are rushing by,) spending their hours, their hopes, their energies, in a way, not only to do them no good; but in a way which if not speedily abandoned, will force

them to curse the day in which *they were born* ! Let we tell you, my young hearers, your life was not given for this world's purposes ; and if you spend it for them, you will spend it very much in vain. Your souls, your immortal souls cannot be satisfied as you hope. You need what the world cannot give. The sooner you are convinced of it the better. You need the favor of God. You need the blood of atonement, and the sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit. As you pass on in life, your hopes will be often disappointed, your world will become a blank to you, and your life a burden ! What gives you most happiness will soon give you most pain ; what now multiplies your joys will soon multiply and embitter your sorrows ; for death will cut down your friends around you ! It will make the world a solitude, and life itself a distress. As you part with them, as you bear away their bones to the land of silence, your hearts will sink within you : and how will you bear the superadded distress of the thought, that your impiety embittered the dying hours of the friend, the father, the mother you will see no more ? Oh, if you but had then that sweet hope that you should see them in heaven, how it would blunt the sting that enters into your soul ! how it would make you realize that life is something more than a sickening scene, and death something else than an eternal separation.

Therefore,

3. How greatly desirable is early piety. This was one of the conclusions which Solomon drew from his varied experience and extensive observation. He had tried the world. He well knew its worth. He had tried religion too ; and having felt how strong an enforcement for religion could be gathered from all that the world contains ; in this Book his mind takes a truly philosophical sweep over the whole range of an earthly existence, and then comes to the conclusions which such a view could not avoid. Early piety is one of these conclusions—"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Notice how he arrives at this conclusion. Both observation and experience help him to it. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is an expression containing the condensation of all that he felt and knew about the world. *I hated life*, is a description of one of his bitter experiences, after he had tried to force the world to make him happy. He wished to save young people from the toilsome and tearful career that he had himself run, while seeking his happiness in luxury and splendor and "amusements," in songs and science, and *whatsoever his heart desired under the sun*. He holds up before them the whole world as it is, when taken as a portion, *vanity, vanity, vanity*, written in letters of fire all over its splendor and pomp and merriment, and even science. He opens to them his heart, his own heart, torn with *vexation*, and sick of life even, while its fondness hung round things *under the sun*. They may glance at the picture, and

then at the heart; and having done so, may take their choice, whether they will spend their earliest and best days for such *vanity*, only to give such *vexation*. But if they will hear him, an old practitioner, an old observer, he tells them in the twelfth chapter, the sentiments which he now entertains, burnt into his heart by the bitterness of an experience from which he would dissuade them. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened; nor the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders shall cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows shall be darkened. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home; and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel be broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

What is it all? all the world? all life? *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity. I hated life.* And shall the young run the same round? shall they lend their minds to the same dream, and their hearts to the same sickening? Shall their best energies be expended in vain? Will they not *believe*, without the bitterness of a trial, that the world cannot answer their purpose? Will they not believe philosophy, gathering up all the worth of the world, and labelling it all, *vanity*? Will they disbelieve history, biography, experience, the grave and God,—all which urge them to the *conclusion of the whole matter*, that, to *fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man*? (12 : 13). But, by and bye, (if they should live), their best days spent, old, worn out, and good for nothing, their bones shaken at the grave's mouth; will they then first begin to think, that *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*? (12 : 14).—Early piety would save them from a world of vexation. Nothing *but* early piety can save many of them from hell. Few of them will live to be old.

My young friends: living in such a world, and hasting to such a tribunal, does thoughtlessness or merriment become you? Must you live to be "amused," and then die to be lost? Remember, you must have a meeting with God! Hide, you cannot! Shrink,

you cannot! You must stand *there*, where the throne blazes, and endless ruin or eternal bliss begins! Despair, perdition, are unnecessary. God *waits to be gracious*. He calls you to Christ. He offers you heaven. You may be saved, if you will. But let me tell you, He will soon take back His offers of fatherly and gracious kindness and love. That *throne of grace* on which He sits, shall soon be taken down, and He will rear on the spot His throne of judgment! "*Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is.*" (1 Cor. 3: 13). "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, that it shall leave neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4: 1). If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4: 18). In view of that dreadful day and all its results—*now*, in your youth—*now*, before you hate life, make your choice betwixt vanity and heaven—truth and falsehood—sin and holiness—the eternal friendship and eternal enmity of God! But, oh! choose wisely, and live for ever.

If you will not choose so, reflect,

4. How strong is the power of sin over the human heart! Men will spend their lives in the very way to make life itself a distress. They will live for the world in a way to poison life's good, and force from their own lips the bitter confession, "I hate life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." It need not be. This life, as an introduction into heaven, may be joy in God, and the triumph of hope over gloom, dissatisfaction, and anguish.

5. Finally, this discussion ought to be a lesson to us on the matter of a worldly prosperity. One of the most amiable sins (if I may speak so), certainly one of the most excusable (if again I may speak so), is the anxiety of parents for the prosperity of their children. But amid that desired prosperity, their very children may *yet hate life*. Let us not expend our affections unwisely. Let us be more anxious, that our children shall be disgusted with a life spent for the world, than that they shall be satisfied with it. Let us be more desirous that they shall be happy in heaven, than prosperous on earth. Let us consult for them, not merely as formed for this world, but as accountable, immortal beings, formed for eternity. If we live to the next Lord's day, let us come to the Lord's table with prayer for them; that our life and our death may not be embittered with the thought of their impiety. If the God of mercy will hear our prayers, and bring them yet to that table with us, we will no longer say—"I hate life"—we will exclaim, Lord, "Now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace, for our eyes have seen thy salvation."—God grant it. Amen.